News



Marie Raber, pictured Aug. 8, 2025, is the facilitator of a job loss support group at Holy Trinity Parish in Washington's Georgetown neighborhood and the former dean and director of the master of social work program at the National Catholic School of Social Service at The Catholic University of America. The Holy Trinity support group was started in the wake of the mass firings and layoffs of federal government workers under the new Trump administration. (OSV News photo/Mark Zimmermann, Catholic Standard)

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This year the mission of Holy Trinity Parish in Washington to "accompany one another in Christ" took on a new focus and a new urgency.

After a Mass earlier this year, parishioners at the Jesuit parish in Washington's Georgetown neighborhood held a meeting to discuss the impact of the new Trump administration's policies.

Jesuit Fr. Kevin Gillespie, Holy Trinity's pastor, said a key concern expressed by attendees was how people had been affected by the mass firings and layoffs of federal government workers, which have led to tens of thousands of people in the Washington area and across the country losing their jobs.

Holy Trinity Parish, known for its social outreach, started a job loss support group after these parishioners expressed their concerns about the federal government job cuts.

"It tapped into the felt need of parishioners who are experiencing enormous grief. ... These people, their livelihoods, their families have been shook up ... (when you're) out of a job, that's painful," Gillespie told the Catholic Standard, Washington's archdiocesan news outlet.

"We're giving them hope," the priest said, adding, "It's part of our spiritual tradition to help people know God is with them."

Marie Raber, facilitator of the job loss support group at Holy Trinity, is a longtime parishioner there who formerly served as the dean and director of the master of social work program at the National Catholic School of Social Service at The Catholic University of America.

Raber earned her master of social work degree and doctorate at Fordham University in New York. Her primary field of practice, research and writing are in the areas of employee assistance programs, downsizing and job loss, and the influence of workplace issues on individuals and families.

Holy Trinity's "Strategies for Survival and Finding Work after Job Loss" support group served its first cohort of 10 people during a six-week session in May and June, and another cohort met in June and July. A third cohort will meet from Sept. 10 to Oct. 15.

The sessions, held in the Parish Center library, open with a prayer and last about one hour and 15 minutes, and participants can attend the 5:30 p.m. weekday Mass in the parish's Chapel of St. Ignatius afterward. The program is available to parishioners and other community members.

Noting that nearly all the participants in the support group have been federal government workers or related employees whose jobs were eliminated in the downsizing, Raber said, "This is a social justice issue. These people have been treated terribly."

"There was no time taken to let the person know how valuable they had been to the department or the organization," she said, "so they were simply told their job was eliminated, (and to) pick up their things and leave the building."

Raber said a key aspect of the job loss support group participants is "they're not alone. Holy Trinity Parish is with them on the journey."

Tom Neeley joined the first Holy Trinity cohort that met for six weekly sessions in May and June and included 10 recently unemployed workers from the parish and community.

A communications consultant working with federal government agencies as clients, Neeley lost his job in the wave of cuts by the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. The contracts his firm had been part of were canceled, and Neeley was furloughed at the end of February and laid off in April.

"It was a hard transition to make, a hard reality, (and) something very humbling," said Neeley, who regularly goes to Mass at Holy Trinity. "It was a difficult role to be in, to realize I needed help."

Raber said she draws on the Ignatian spirituality central to that Jesuit faith community.

"I learned sometimes prayer doesn't change things, (but) it gives you the ability and the strength and the grace to deal with the challenge. The cross is not taken away, but you do receive the strength and the grace to deal with it," she said.

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Raber structured the program to begin with helping participants deal with the loss of their jobs, which she said is a different experience for each person.

"I tell them it has nothing to do with their performance. In reviewing their resumes, these are some of the most educated and accomplished people that I have ever worked with," she said.
A period of mourning is natural after one's job loss, Raber added. "I give them the opportunity to process the loss."

In the support group, Raber also encourages participants to recognize and understand their key strengths and to review their accomplishments. She asks people in the group to come up with their "best accomplishment that reflects who you are and what you did," which helps them build self-confidence and seek out the position that fits them best.

Participants also identify their career objectives. The power of networking is also a key emphasis of the program. Such networking, Raber said, is crucial for people who've lost jobs and for people who still have their jobs but are worried about the future. "It's all about relationships right now," she said.

Raber said she tells participants, "Don't just look for the next job, but look for the job that most reflects your abilities, your interests and your strengths."

When Hannah Byrd heard about Holy Trinity's job loss support group, she joined the cohort that met for six weekly sessions in June and July.

In 2023, she began working for Democracy International in programs funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. She and colleagues were furloughed after USAID funding was cut off. She began searching for a new job in February.

"It came at a really critical time for me in the job search process," said Byrd, who is not Catholic. She had begun feeling hopeless about finding new work. The group helped participants "feel proud of our accomplishments, and be hopeful there are good opportunities out there for us," she said.

As she navigates a crowded job market, Byrd said the Holy Trinity support group "has been so helpful keeping hope alive. That's the key to persevering through this."

For the past 21 years, Gene Lin worked with the MITRE Corp., which runs Federally Funded Research and Development Centers. As an aviation policy engineer, his work in air traffic safety and airfield design and efficiency was supported by the Federal Aviation Administration.

When Lin, a member of Holy Trinity Parish for about two decades, heard the parish was offering a job loss support group, he joined the first cohort that began meeting in May.

"I was a little bit skeptical going into it," he said. "I felt at the very least it was a way to provide emotional and spiritual support and to build community."

Lin said the program turned out to be "well thought-out," offering practical steps to prepare for a job transition.

"The program helped me to think through the different kinds of alternatives I have in front of me. … I can look for a couple of different kinds of jobs," he said, adding that he has had several discussions with two universities.

While the federal workforce is in flux, Raber said people who've lost their jobs or who are uncertain about the future of their jobs can take steps for some internal control of their lives, like updating their resumes, talking with mentors, reflecting on their strengths and interests and accomplishments, and prioritizing self-care, with daily prayer, exercise and a healthy diet.

"You start taking control of a couple of things in your own life. Some things you can't control, like in the federal government, who they're going to lay off next," she said.

The support of family members and friends is important for anyone who's lost a job, Raber said. "You can't travel this journey alone. … You need people who love you and support you.
Raber tells participants that in their next job, they may have to do something

different and even relocate to another area.

"As difficult as this situation is, this loss can lead to something positive in your life, such as a new position focusing on a job or skills that you were not able to tap into in the past, or interests that you were not able to tap into in your previous position," she said.